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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to increase teachers' awareness of the problems of three "hidden minorities"--the handicapped, the aging, and families with nontraditional life styles--and to point out ways in which teachers can help students learn to deal fairly and realistically with persons in these groups. For each of the three minority groups, the paper discusses general problems of its members, points to common stereotypes, indicates the need for educational materials that deal with it in a positive manner, and describes books for children and adolescents that feature members of that minority in a realistic manner. The paper notes that such books are conspicuously absent from listings of children's favorite books and urges teachers to direct students' attention to books of this kind. A bibliography of recommended books, grouped according to the hidden minority with which they deal, is included. (GW)

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"THE HIDDEN MINORITIES: SEX AND RACE ARE NOT ENOUGH"

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

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INTRODUCTION

Current affirmative action policies have placed major emphasis on the recognition of sex and race stereotypes and their removal from instructional materials. Indeed, if the struggle for equal rights for women and civil rights for all ethnic groups has accomplished one thing for us, it is the awareness of the sexist and racist stereotypical statements that we make and the biased attitudes that we all have. Because of this acute awareness, all of us are making positive strides to alter our own biases, and to watch with a careful eye what we say and do, and how we view jobs and roles. We are making positive strides as individuals to treat other individuals fairly.

However, sex and race are <u>not</u> enough! For true affirmative action, society must also deal fairly with its <u>hidden</u> minorities. Hidden minorities, those groups which we do not either visualize as groups or see as special problems, are often portrayed stereotypically. Our changing society also demands that we deal realistically and not judgmentally with the handicapped, the aging , and families with different life styles: one-parent families, families of mixed racial parentage, families consisting of adopted children of other nationalities.

The purpose of this presentation is to increase our awareness of these hidden minorities and to suggest how teachers can address these issues through the use of children's literature.

THE HANDICAPPED

The handicapped are a hidden minority in our country which is presently becoming vocal. They are marching on state capitals and on Washington, D.C., demanding fair treatment in education and in employment.

The passage of Public Law 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975) will have as much impact on education today as did the Civil Rights Legislation of the late 1950's. We are now required to educate most of the handicapped children of our communities in our classrooms. Discrimination against the handicapped is now illegal, and the physical plants as well as the curriculum must be altered to accommodate these children. Ten to fifteen percent of the population of the United States is composed of persons with "exceptionalities," which include the following: physical disabilities; visual, hearing, and speech impairments; giftedness; learning disabilities; emotional and behavioral problems; mental retardation; and neurological problems.

There are approximately 8 million children in the United States today who are classified as physically, mentally, or

emotionally handicapped, but probably less than 1% of educational materials represent persons with these exceptionalities.

Let us take what we have learned from our sex and race awareness and apply it to the handicapped. If we look through the many books which we use daily, we would find miniscule numbers of children in wheelchairs, for example, and if we did find one, chances are that the child in that wheelchair would be watching an activity rather than participating in it. Yet there is a national wheelchair basketball league; Teddy Kennedy, Jr., goes skiing; the present Administrator of Veterans' Affairs in Washington, Max Cleland, is a triple amputee. He even refuses to have the chauffeur-driven car to which he is entitled, preferring to drive his own automobile.

In educational material, representation of persons with exceptionalities appears to exhibit many of the problems evidenced in studies of the treatment of sex roles and of various ethnic and racial groups in similar materials. A growing concern for the fair and adequate representation of persons with exceptionalities, and attention in the education profession to mainstreaming, indicate the need for similar guidelines regarding the treatment of these persons in materials used in or out of the classroom.

Our intention should be to assure that printed materials

and oral communication reflect a positive, fair, and balanced representation of persons with exceptionalities. It is expected that such representation will help all persons with and without exceptionalities to live their lives with a realistic and empathetic understanding of individual differences and abilities. We should show in our behavior the overall similarity of human wants and needs, and the recognition that each individual is unique.

According to Guidelines established by the Consortium for Appropriate Representation of Exceptional Persons in Educational Material,* the representation of persons with exceptionalities should be accurate and free from stereotypes. Each exceptionality has varying degrees of severity. We must be careful not to represent the deaf as dumb; the blind as pitiful; the intellectual as an egghead or a bookworm; or the mentally retarded as unkempt or foolish. We must not speak of "blind beggars," "disfigured villains," or "insane criminals."

We must attend to other details also. Handicapped persons should be portrayed in the least restrictive environment. They should be shown participating in activities which include them in the mainstream of society. A variety of appropriate role models of persons with handicaps should be provided. We should demonstrate the achievements of such individuals and their

*Guidelines for the Representation of Exceptional Persons in Educational Materials. Published by the National Center on Educational Media and Materials for the Handicapped.

ability to live satisfying and productive lives. Many exceptional children and adults are employed and involved in all areas of life, and they must be represented as such. We must make certain that individuals with and without handicaps are shown interacting in ways that are mutually beneficial.

We must deal honestly with our children and ourselves -- and not be afraid to discuss the handicapped. By using relevant children's literature, we as teachers can increase our students' awareness and understanding of the handicaps with which others are afflicted.

We all are very aware of Louis Braille, a French student in the early 1800's, who unlocked a world of knowledge for the blind with his invention of the Braille alphabet. Louis Braille worked for two years on his ideas, and in 1824 when he was 15 years old, he had perfected it. How exciting for children to realize that a 15-year-old had an idea that changed the world forever for an entire group of handicapped people. What a contribution to mankind! And made by a child! Books such as TOUCH OF LIGHT: THE STORY OF LOUIS BRAILLE by Anne E. Niemark* bring such a message to our children.

Helen Keller is a favorite heroine among late elementary and junior high school students. Books about her are read voraciously by boys and girls alike, and she certainly had to

*See attached bibliography for books referred to in this paper

overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Helen Keller, who was blind, deaf, and dumb (which, by the way, means "without speech" and has nothing whatsoever to do with mental ability -- the preferred term is "mute") wrote that "blindness separates people from things, but deafness separates people from people."

THE WITCH'S DAUGHTER (by Nina Bawden) is a fictional adventure of Tim and Janey, who is blind; CONNIE'S NEW EYES (by Bernard Wolf) is a true story of Connie David, a young teacher blind from birth and her seeing-eye dog; SALLY CAN'T SEE (by Palle Peterson) is a nonfiction book full of color photographs showing how Sally swims, rides a horse, goes to school, and reads by using braille; CHILD OF THE SILENT NIGHT: THE STORY OF LAURA BRIDGMAN (by Edith Fisher Hunter) is a nonfiction account of a young girl born in 1829 who became deaf, blind, and mute at the age of two. This inspiring story of a young heroine and a devoted doctor is not as familiar as Helen Keller's triumphs.

We must realize that deafness is a hidden affliction -- and that over 2 million people in the United States today suffer from this invisible handicap. They cannot communicate in the normal language of the hearing, and are completely isolated from that community, unless they develop their own means of communication. DAVID IN SILENCE (by Veronica Robinson) is an award-

winning book which shows us how a deaf boy learns to reach out to others, and in so doing, proves his own worth as a person. Two nonfiction accounts of deafness, made all the more realistic because they are done with photographs, are ANNA'S SILENT WORLD by Bernard Wolf and CLAIRE AND EMMA by Diane Peter. We learn from Claire and Emma, who were born deaf, how hard it is to learn to speak, for example, when we cannot hear. Anna shows us vividly the triumphs and frustrations in the busy, active life of a young girl trying to overcome her handicap.

Cerebral palsy is another affliction. In MINE FOR KEEPS, Jean Little has written an absorbing story of Sarah Jane, a young child with cerebral palsy from a loving, understanding family and the struggle she has in being accepted in a regular classroom situation. This book points up the daily trials of this child, not because of her lack of intelligence, but because of the physical things that are expected of her by her teacher and classmates, who at first do not "think." After reading this marvelous book, we will all become a bit more tolerant and understanding.

A true example of cerebral palsy in a classroom is Lydia G., 21, an honor student at Holyoke Community College, who speaks three languages and plans on a career as a teacher of Special Education. She could not walk until she was nine, nor speak distinctly when she was 12. With an understanding

principal and teacher, and with helping classmates, she successfully completed school and went on to college, the recipient of a scholarship set up by her classmates for students "who displayed courage in the face of adversity." (New York Times Magazine, January 2, 1977, pp. 24-33)

Mental retardation is another exceptionality which we can expect to encounter in our classroom with much greater frequency. The President's Committee on Mental Retardation states that 85-90% of the mildly retarded -- which represents 95% of the total retarded population -- are victims of environmental factors which include poverty, racial and ethnic discrimination, and family distress.

The Committee stated that a better life can be attained for these mentally retarded people by improving public attitudes. The Committee traced the image of the mentally retarded from the "menacing moron" of the 1900's to the "eternal child" of the 1950's to today's image of the "adult citizen with equal rights despite differences in capabilities and appearance." But they warn us that this statement of today is "a thin veneer" which is not yet "deeply implanted in the minds and hearts of more than a handful of people."

In order to improve public attitudes, we should focus on human values, work with and accept the handicapped, and certainly

familiarize our elementary and secondary school students with the realities of physical and mental handicaps.

Sensitive attitudes toward mental retardation are to be found in books such as HEY DUMMY by Kin Platt, TAKE WING by Jean Little, THE SECRET GARDEN by Frances Hodgson Burnett and the story "Raymond's Run" by Toni Cade Bambara (from the book TALES AND STORIES FOR BLACK FOLKS) which give us a picture of the retarded child that is both realistic and sympathetic. These books mark a progression from the prejudicial stereotyped attitudes of most non-handicapped onlookers to the understanding of compassionate individuals. The books end with hope and with growth, and should make all of us more compassionate.

THE AGING

The elderly form a separate minority group that is overlooked in classroom literature. Although the elder citizens are not normally members of our classroom, they are a constant part of our environment. How do we see the elderly around us? If we are young, do we look at that "aging" principal and his "antediluvian" ideas? If we are approaching retirement, do we view this, with fear and anger, as being thrown onto the trash heap along with yesterday's newspaper, afraid of the void which faces us? If we are young, do we look with respect at our elders and seek their wise counsel; if we are wise with ancient wisdom, do we offer experiences freely and with kindness?

Our pre-school and school-age children view old age in a negative way. A research study done by the University of Maryland Center on Aging reports that young children hold negative physical images of the elderly. They are "sick, sad, tired, dirty, ugly, wrinkled, crippled, chew funny and haven't any teeth." A study done for the American Association of Retired People and the National Retired Teachers Association reiterates these sentiments -- "sick, sad, ugly, bad."

However, the personalities of the elderly were more appreciated than their physical traits in both of these studies. The more positive descriptors were "friendly, good, kind, rich, and wonderful." The children in Maryland thought that older people could be helpful to them.

These ambiguous feelings point up the complexity of attitudes which children have toward the aging people of the community. The study goes on to point out that most of the children's stereotypes of the aging come from books. Most early reading experience deals with the two age groups of parents and children. Few reading materials show old people at all, let alone in a favorable light. Furthermore, with the nuclear, mobile family, few children grow up in homes with grandparents.

Dr. Edward Ansello, Associate Director of the Center on Aging at the University of Maryland, took on the task of

documenting ageism in almost 700 children's books which were available to him through his local library system. His study is both revealing and frightening. As quoted in THE NEW YORK TIMES, Friday, January 7, 1977, Dr. Ansello found "that only 16 percent contained any older characters at all..." This omission was a subtle indication to children that the elderly are not important in everyday life.

When the aging do appear in stories, he said, they rarely have fully developed characters. More than 75% have "no real function or position." The words "old," "little," or "ancient" are used as descriptors. Personalities are described as "sad" and "poor."

Dr. Bruno Bettelheim of the University of Chicago agrees with Dr. Ansello's conclusions. He found that older people were depicted as ugly, stupid, abusive, and, what's almost worse, insipid. There are few books that show the elderly as real people.

FIRST SNOW by Helen Coutant, GROWING TIME by Sandol Stoddard Warburg, and NIGHT OF THE LEONIDS by E. L. Konigsburg are examples of books that show great insight into the relationships between children and their grandparents, where the bond of mutual friendship and respect grows out of the natural loving relationship. These are real people, not merely

insipid and shadowy members of a family. In FITZGO - THE WILD DOG OF CENTRAL PARK by Paul Wilkes, a sympathetic portrait of an elderly man emerges as he befriends and tames a wild dog of whom everyone else is afraid.

If they cannot read about the elderly then there is little way for many children to know them. Children are usually bored by older people. This is indeed very sad, because people are living even longer today, and we are soon to be faced with a society whose average age is rising.

The fact that Congress is considering raising the mandatory retirement age to 70 instead of the present 65 points up the power of the elderly as a voting bloc. One of the amazing facts of the discussion concerning that bill is that a number of younger working people are in favor of it. Perhaps once these younger people come in contact with their older colleagues through mutual work and interests, they gain respect for them as people and can view them as valued, contributing members of the community, instead of innocuous baby-sitters.

FAMILY LIFE-STYLE

- Now let's turn our attention to the truly hidden minorities in our classroom -- the children! Do we know where they come from and where they go each day when they are not within the confines of the school building? How do they live? In fact,

for some of them, the question is actually, how do they survive?

Here are some headlines from recent issues of THE NEW YORK TIMES -- hardly a paper known for its sensationalism.

*Teenage Pregnancies Reach Epidemic Proportion (9/24/77)

*One-third of Births in Philadelphia Last Year Were Illegitimate; Great Number of Mothers 10-14 Years Old (10/4/77)

*People Living Together But Not Married Has Increased 800% in the Last Year (12/8/76)

*Study Finds Drinking - Often to Excess - Now Starts at an Earlier Age. 1.3 Million Preteens and Teenage Children Have Serious Drinking Problems (3/27/77)

*One-third of All Marriages End in Divorce (12/77)

*One-fourth to One-third of All Children in the U.S. Live Under Conditions of Poverty (9/12/77)

*46% of American Children under 18 Have Mothers Who Work (3/1/77)

*37% of Pre-school Children Have Mothers Who Work (ibid.)

*The Number of Children Whose Mothers Work is 28.2 Million (ibid.)

*13,000 Korean Orphans Have Been Adopted by Americans Since 1955 (ibid.)

*300,000 Children Are Living in Foster Homes in the U.S. (30,000 in N.Y. Alone) (A U.S. Bureau of Census Report, 12/76)

As we attempt to digest the facts, can we mentally match a

child to the family situation implied in the headline? If so, are we prepared to deal with that child in a positive, helpful way, or do we unintentionally "visit the sins of the parents" upon that child? Do we realize that the child who is falling behind in reading, or in any other subject, may in fact be from a broken home; have a mother who is in a mental institution, and/or an alcoholic father; may in fact be on the way to being an alcoholic himself or herself because it is too hard to cope with the problems of mere daily existence? Just arriving at school may be a feat similar to climbing Mt. Everest for this kind of child.

When a child's homework is not done, do we ask "Why?" Do we speak in a menacing way, or in a kind, helpful, and caring way? Do we allow an individual the time to "open up" to us? Most children do not want to fail -- in fact, most don't even want to displease. Sometimes they cannot do otherwise.

If we read beyond the headlines, one out of every three children in our classrooms six years from now may be the child of an unmarried teenaged mother, and most of these, parent and child, will be struggling below the poverty level as well. What chance will they have? What chance will the alcoholic in our elementary school classroom have?

Several authors are struggling with the challenges of

helping us understand the mental and emotional anguish which afflicts even the "best" adjusted child affected by one of our "deviant" situations. Some books fall within the category of "bibliotherapy" and can be helpful to the childr n themselves. Some make very valuable reading for all of us, because they provide the tolerance and understanding we all need in order to deal with one another.

MY DAD LIVES IN A DOWNTOWN HOTEL by Peggy Mann is a story about a divorced family and the guilt felt by a child who is certain that he is the cause of his parents' breakup. This is a normal feeling for all children of broken homes, so that this book is helpful and supportive.

Eleanor Clymer deals with more difficult family problems in very realistic fashion. In MY BROTHER STEVIE, Annie is forced to care for her younger brother after their mother has run away, because their grandmother with whom they are forced to live is resentful of the mother's behavior. LUKE WAS THERE deals with a child left by his mother in a foster care institution and the friendship that develops between him and Luke, the social worker at the institution.

MY NAME IS DAVY: I'M AN ALCOHOLIC by Anne Snyder, tells of the final self-recogniton of Davy's condition only after he is struck by a personal tragedy.

The heroine of FOSTER CHILD by Marion Dane Bauer is Renny, a child who never knew her father and who had to be placed in a foster home because the great-grandmother whom she loved and with whom she had lived for all of her 12 years had to be taken to a hospital. There are four other foster children in this home who each have to deal with different personal problems.

ESCAPE THE RIVER by Ray Brown is an appealing and realistic story of twelve-year-old Paul Nolan who struggles with his own status as an adopted child, wishing to run away from his unhappy home life, and yet realizing that his prime responsibility is to protect and care for his retarded brother.

PAUL AND ETTA by Richard Parker is about an orphan in an orphanage and her later adoption into a family. All is not perfect in this supposedly "ideal" situation. Many problems must be met.

CALL ME AL RAFT by Richard Shaw deals with a mother who is a prostitute and a boy looking for his own identity. BLUEGRASS IGGY by Mary Sullivan and UNA AND THE HEAVEN BABY by Prudence Andrew are both new books that describe one-parent families.

THE EMANCIPATION OF JOE TEPPER by Pat Egan Dexter tells of Joe, who had trouble enough when his mother was alive because she was an alcoholic, but now that she is dead, he is forced to

deal with the Department of Welfare, a social worker, and the prospect of going to a foster home.

THEY CAME TO STAY by Marjorie Margolis is the autobiography of an NBC news reporter's struggle to adopt first a Korean orphan and then a Vietnamese orphan as a single woman. This book is meant for an older audience, but it forecasts a change that is taking place in our society.

THE PROBLEM

These few examples are cited as illustrations that books about social problems and differing life styles do exist. They are relatively few in number, and are of very recent publication date, but many more are on the editorial desks and in the authors' typewriters. However, they do not necessarily get READ.

"Classroom Choices" is an annual listing which cites the "direct choices" by children of all tradebooks published in the U.S. during the previous year. Out of the 2000 tradebooks published in 1976, for example, approximately 500 were chosen (by adults) "for inherent excellence and diversity of types and subjects," and then were presented to children in the classroom to read. Each of five teams of authors and educators, using a minimum of 30 classrooms each, which they say represents a field test of approximately 5000 children, then have the children choose their favorite books.

In "Classroom Choices of 1976" (books published in 1975), not one book for either beginning readers seven and under, or for the seven to ten year olds, dealt with either handicapped children or adults, or a distressful family situation. For the over 10 there is one "funny, fast-paced story of teenagers in the ghetto." There is one story of "orphaned Lewis," but his being an orphan has nothing to do with the mystery that is the heart of the plot. There is one touching story about a young girl's friendship and dedication to a lonely old man, and one adoptive family -- in Nova Scotia in 1870.

In 1977 (books published in 1976), our "hidden minorities" did only slightly better. One out of 54 books for the beginning reader dealt with a divorced family. In ELIZA'S DADDY by Ianthe Thomas, a new wife has her own children, and Eliza is afraid that her step-sister is more talented than she. The girls meet when Daddy has his weekly visits with Eliza. Everything turns out exceptionally well and the book shows a warm father-daughter relationship with no problems.

In 1977 four of the 32 books for middle readers -- seven to ten years old -- fit into some type of problem category, but only one of these fits into the troubled family problems discussed above. SOMEBODY ELSE'S CHILD by Roberta Silman tells a sensitive story about adopted children.

Interestingly, there are no books listed for the older readers that illustrate any of these problem areas. In 1976, either older readers were not exposed to, or didn't like, books with heroes and heroines faced with anything more challenging than solving mysteries or finding buried treasure. There was one biography in the category "Informational Books" -- THE STORY OF STEVIE WONDER.

CONCLUSIONS

What does all this mean? I think it indicates that we, as teachers, have a grave responsibility. We cannot find solutions to family situations in the percentages of Affirmative Action Policies, or even in the helpful guidelines for fair treatment of the handicapped. We must, instead, meet each individual face to face, with compassion and understanding, and not stand in judgment. We must become aware of the varied problems that these individuals may be facing daily. We must be tolerant. We should direct our students to the library shelves, so that they can use the books available to help them grow and understand the problems which some of their classmates face daily. By reading, children can realize the effort needed for some of their peers to accomplish the small tasks which they themselves take for granted. Teachers and students can be helpful and supportive -- and can learn and grow -- together.

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